

Boston ~~Palmer~~ 1753

*The Duty of Ministers to preach Doctrines
of Practice.*

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S E R M O N

Preach'd at *Norton*, January 3^d. 1753.

At the Ordination of the Reverend
Mr. *Joseph Palmer*.

By JOHN MELLEN, A. M.

Pastor of the second Church in *Lancaster*.

—And the acknowledging the Truth, which is, κατὰ εὐσεβειαν,
after Godliness. Titus 1. 1.

For the Grace of God, that bringeth Salvation, hath appeared
unto all Men, teaching us that denying Ungodliness and
worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly
in this present World. St. Paul.

B O S T O N : N. E.

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The Duty of Ministers to protect the
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The Gospel a Doctrine according
to Godliness.

I TIMOTHY vi. 3.

—*And to the Doctrine which is according
to Godliness.*—

The whole Period runs thus,

If any Man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine which is according to Godliness; he is proud, knowing Nothing, but doting about Questions and Strifes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, evil Surmisings; perverse disputings of Men of corrupt Minds, and destitute of the Truth, supposing that Gain is Godliness: from such withdraw thy self.

THE Lord Jesus Christ, the great Founder of our Religion, came into our World in human Nature, to establish a Kingdom of Peace and Truth and Righteousness, in Opposition to that of Satan, consisting in Error, Superstition, and moral Wickedness. And his glorious Gospel, that powerful Instrument of Men's Salvation, is a Scheme of Doctrine, admirably concerted to promote this great and worthy Design.

And

The Gospel a Doctrine

And the Ministers of Christ, the Stewards of the Mysteries of his Kingdom, are divinely Commissioned, and sent forth, conformable to the Example of their great Lord and Master, *to build up* the Church of God in the World, by preaching the Doctrine of Godliness, by calling Sinners to Repentance, and giving the Knowledge of Salvation unto his People, by the Remission of Sins, thro' the tender Mercies of God, that being delivered out of the Hands of our *spiritual* Enemies, we might serve him without Fear in Holiness and Righteousness all the Days of our Lives. *

Accordingly it is the Duty of the Ministers of Religion, the *Preachers of Righteousness*, to inculcate upon their Hearers, with Spirit and Energy, the eternal indispensable Obligations of Morality, and all the sublime Virtues and Duties of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and to demonstrate and improve all religious Truths, *useful, practical, and necessary* to Salvation.

There is a Difference among the Truths, as well as Laws of God: As there is a great Commandment and a less, so there are Doctrines of greater and less Importance in Christianity.

Some Points are chiefly speculative, others refer more immediately to Practice, and these latter are the most essential Doctrines in Religion; because the End of all Revelation, and the Belief of it, is *Godliness*.

That Knowledge which affects the Head *only*, is not *saving*, nor does it come under the Notion of Religion and Virtue. Points of Faith ought to be discuss'd to serve the Ends of religious Practice, but practical Godliness is preach'd for its own Sake. Holiness and Goodness, are the great Things

* Luk. i. 74, 75.

Things inculcated upon Mankind by the sacred Scriptures, and urg'd by various and affecting Motives. *Duty* and *Virtue* were very much the Subjects of our Lord's Preaching, and those of his Apostles. Our Lord explain'd and enforc'd the Laws of God, and rais'd the *Morality* of *Moses* and the Prophets to its greatest Perfection; and his Apostles follow'd the Example of their Master, and tho' they by no Means neglected the great Articles of Christian Faith and Verity, yet it is plain their Sermons & Epistles, were directly calculated to advance Righteousness, Sobriety and Godliness among Men.

The Paragraph containing the Text, is introduc'd by the Apostle, in Consequence of what he had before observ'd, in Opposition to that *corrupt ungodly* Notion, that Christianity dissolv'd civil Obligations, and set Servants at Liberty from Obedience to their Masters; whereas on the contrary, its direct Tendency was to make them, and all Men *better* in their several Relations and Conditions in Life. These Things the Apostle commands *Timothy* the Evangelist to teach and exhort.

The Words, consider'd in Conjunction with the Context, offer to our Consideration three Things, *obviously observable*, and not altogether Impertinent to the Occasion & Solemnity of this Day.

- I. That the Gospel is a Doctrine according to Godliness. Therefore,
- II. It is the Business and Duty of the Ministers of the Gospel, to preach the *Doctrines of Practice*, and improve the Truths of Religion to the excellent Ends of Holiness and true Virtue.
- III. Such as teach otherwise, are grossly ignorant of the *great Design* of their sacred Function, and *vilely* pervert it to the worst of Purposes.

The Gospel a Doctrine

I. That the Gospel is a Doctrine according to Godliness. This great Truth may be illustrated from the Consideration of the *necessary Design* of all divine Institutions of Religion, *in general*; and from the natural and genuine Tendency of all the great and uncontroverted Doctrines of Christianity, *in particular*.

The Happiness of all rational Natures is founded in that *moral Rectitude and Perfection*, which in the Language of the Holy Ghost is stil'd a Participation of the divine Nature. And to bring Mankind to the *Temper & Character*, to the sincere Love and Worship of the one true God, and the steady Practice of all social and personal Vertues, is the End and Perfection of all true Religion, under all its *Forms*. To this Purpose are the following Words of an excellent Writer. *

“ The only Reason why God, who stands in Need of
 “ Nothing, and is infinitely self-sufficient for his own
 “ Happiness, ever created any rational Creatures at all,
 “ was that by following the Light of the Reason he has
 “ given 'em, and by imitating the moral Perfections of
 “ God, by obeying his Precepts in the Practice of Virtue
 “ and Righteousness, they might (as St. *Peter* expresses it)
 “ become Partakers of the divine Nature, (i. e.) might
 “ have such Degrees communicated to them of their Cre-
 “ ator's Happiness, as by their Nature irrational Creatures
 “ are incapable of.

“ Now the Perfections of God being absolutely un-
 “ changeable, and the Nature of Good and Evil essentially
 “ invariable; 'tis manifest that that Practice of Virtue
 “ and Righteousness, that Worship of God, who ruleth
 “ over all, and the Justice and Goodness due from one
 “ Creature to another, in which the Essence of true
 “ Religion consists: must among all rational Beings, in
 all

“ all Parts of the Universe, and in all Periods of Time,
“ be eternally and universally the same.

“ Had all Creatures therefore always continued inno-
“ cent & virtuous, the Form & Method of Religion cou’d
“ never have admitted of any Change. And for the same
“ Reason, when upon the Account of Sin, the Mercy of God
“ has vouchsafed to appoint any particular Method or In-
“ stitution of Religion in order to the Acceptance and
“ Reconciliation of Sinners ; ’tis evident, that the ulti-
“ mate End and Design of every such Method or Insti-
“ tution of Religion can possibly be no other, than the
“ Recovery or bringing back of such Persons to the same
“ State, in which they would originally have been fix’d,
“ had their been no Transgression.” Thus he.

If therefore the Christian Religion carry with it unde-
niable Marks of a divine Original, and is capable of a ra-
tional and solid Defence, it follows, that it must be an
Institution, ultimately adapted to *reform* a vicious World,
to correct the Manners of Men, rectify their Mistakes, re-
move their Prejudices, and in a Word, to bring into Sub-
jection every Thing that exalts itself against God and
Goodness.

The *Evidence* of the Truth of the Doctrine of Christ, is
as great, as the Nature of the Case will admit of, and is
abundantly sufficient for the Conviction of all virtuous un-
prejudic’d Men : If the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them,
in whom the God of this World has blinded their Minds.
2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.— And tho’ it is manifest, that some Doc-
trines can’t be prov’d true, by all the *Miracles* in the World,
and some Miracles under *some Circumstances* are no Proof
at all of the Doctrines they are brought to support ; yet,
the Argument, for the Confirmation of the Christian Re-
ligion, taken from the *Miracles* of our Lord Jesus Christ ;

if the special Circumstances of those preternatural Operations be duly attended to, is *sufficiently conclusive*; they being *numerous, evident* and very *beneficial* to Mankind, and the Truths they are design'd to demonstrate, *possible and reasonable* in themselves, and tending to advance the Glory of God, and the Holiness and Happiness of his Creatures.

The Argument founded upon *Prophecy*, is equally convincing.

And these Things amount to a still greater and more certain Proof, by the Consideration of the *moral Characters* of our blessed Lord, and his holy Apostles.

It is a great & excellent Truth, and worthy of all Faith and Acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the World, to reveal and establish a gracious Scheme and Method of Religion; thereby to save and redeem Mankind from all Iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works.

God almighty early made the gracious Promise that *One* descended of the human Race, shou'd rise up and become a Deliverer to his Brethren.

This Promise made to *Adam*, was renew'd and ratified to *Abraham*, and afterwards to *David*, signifying that of the Fruit of his Body, God would set the *Messias* upon his Throne, who shou'd be above the Kings of the Earth.

And in the Book of *ancient Prophecy*, all the Circumstances of his Birth, Life and Death, are distinctly related. Accordingly, in the Fulness of the Time appointed, this *glorious Minister* of the heavenly Court appeared here in our World, a Man, full of the Holy Ghost, and posselt without Measure, of the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding in the Fear of the Lord. He officiated in his public Capacity, and discharg'd the Duties of his heavenly Function for several Years,— was visible frequently after
his

his Resurrection—constituted some to be his *Witnesses*, and sent them forth, invested with divine Power, to declare his *Authority*, and publish his Gospel in all Nations.— His Religion obtain'd universally, the World was enlighten'd and reform'd by his Doctrine,— and faithful Records of all these Things have been handed down to us, on whom the Ends of the World are come.

And can it be after all, that never any such Person as our *blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, shou'd have come into the World? Were all the Prophets *Liars*, all the Apostles *Impostors*, the sacred Scripture a profane Forgery? And can the whole glorious Scheme of Christianity be only a *Chimera*, a *meer Farce and Delusion*? Thus the Christian System is of God, and consequently the Gospel is a Doctrine according to Godliness.

The same important Truth may be further illustrated, by the Consideration of the *natural and genuine Tendency* of all the great and uncontroverted Doctrines of Christianity. It was admirably said by a dignified Clergyman. †

“ There was none of the Doctrines of our Saviour, calculated for the Gratification of Men's idle Curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy and useless Speculations; much less were they intended for an Excuse of our Credulity, or a Trial how far we could bring our Reason to submit to our Faith: But as on the one Hand, they were plain and simple, and such as, by their Agreeableness to the rational Faculties of Mankind, did highly recommend themselves to our Belief; so on the other Hand, they had an immediate Relation to Practice, and were the genuine Principles and Foundation upon which all humane and divine Virtues were naturally to be superstructur'd.” Thus he.

The Design of all Knowledge, Revelation and Faith, is evidently the Advancement of *practical Virtue and Godliness*: And so far forth as they fall short of this, they answer to no valuable Purpose. The divine Authority of the Law of *Moses* might justly be call'd in Question, were it not capable of Proof, that that religious *Œconomy* ultimately tended to promote the Interest of real Piety and Morality among Mankind.

There were two *grand and general* Reasons of the very extraordinary Conduct of divine Providence toward the *Hebrew People*, the Seed of *Abraham*.

The first was, that by such a public Manifestation of his almighty Power, the Nations round about, even the whole *Eastern World*, then overspread with Idolatry and Polytheism, might have full Demonstration of the incomparable Greatness of the God of *Israel*, and be induc'd to abandon their Idols, and submit to *Jehovah*, as the only living and true God.

The second was, to continue that *refractory People*, in the Faith, Worship and Obedience of the *one true God*, in Opposition to the Pagan Superstition.

The great and munificent God, had a further View than the Good of that *People* meerly, in his singular and most surprizing Administrations towards them, *viz.* That all the People of the Earth might know the Hand of the Lord, that it is *mighty*. *Josh. 4. 24.*

The Fame of these Things easily extended itself into all the habitable World, for they were transacted, as it were, in the Heart and *Center* of the Nations, in the Land of *Egypt and Judea*, the most convenient *Posts*, for transmitting the News of these important Events into the East, into *Africa*, and the Isles of the Sea.

And

And the supream Excellency, and sublime Glories of the *everlasting Gospel*, in great Measure consists, in the more effectual Provision it makes for reducing Sinners to Repentance, strengthening the virtuous Resolutions of Christians, and securing Obedience to the Laws of God. The Laws of Christianity are guarded with the most powerful *Sanctions*, the Promises and Threatnings of the greatest Good and Evil. These Arguments taken from the unseen eternal World, design'd to operate upon the *Hopes & Fears* of Men, are the greatest and strongest Enforcements of religious Practice, that human Nature is capable of receiving.

Christianity is the most *perfect Institution* of Religion, because it teaches the best Rules of moral Righteousness, and omits nothing that can help to secure the Practice of it. Mankind, of the two, stood in more Need of *Motives* to the Practice of Holiness, than of Instructions in Virtue, tho' they were both necessary; for as ignorant as Men generally are, they have for the most Part, more Understanding than moral Goodness, they know better than they do.

The Doctrine of Repentance from dead Works, is one of *St. Paul's Fundamentals*, Heb. 6. 1. and is Part of the Apostle's Form of *sound Words*, and is manifestly a Doctrine according to Godliness, for the very *Thing* is a turning from Sin to Holiness, and consists in an intire Renovation of Mind and Manners, and is the Foundation of Religion and a good Life.

The Doctrine of Forgiveness of Sins that are past, upon Repentance, thro' the Forbearance of God, in Virtue of the Gospel Act of Grace, is a powerful Argument and Motive to Obedience in Time to come. "For Christ came into the World to procure Pardon for past Sins, for no other Reason but that he might more effectually prevent it for the future." The

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The Doctrine of *Satisfaction, vicarious Sufferings, and redundant Merit*, however scoff'd at by profane Infidels, are notwithstanding improv'd by St. Peter, to the Ends of Holiness, 1 Epist. 2.24. *Who his own self bore our Sins in his own Body on the Tree, that we being dead to Sin, should live unto Righteousness.*

The Faith of God's Elect is the *acknowledging* of the Truth, which is after Godliness. It is the Observation of a learned Commentator, "That a good and wise God
" cannot reveal Things only to stuff our Heads with No-
" tions, when they have no Influence upon our Hearts
" to make us better : Since then to disbelieve them wou'd
" be pernicious, and yet the believing of them wou'd do
" us no Good ; and a wise God must require this Faith
" to no End, his Design in requiring us to believe in
" Jesus Christ, being this, that believing we may have
" Life thro' his Name, and the very End of our Faith is
" the Salvation of our Souls ; he therefore can require
" us to believe Nothing, but what hath a real Tendency
" to the obtainment of that Life, and that Salvation,
" which is the End of our whole Faith."*

The Doctrine of *Baptism* is practically Influential in a high Degree, since the *moral Signification* of that Christian Rite, is purity of Heart and Manners, and typifies that rising to a spiritual & virtuous Life, which is *emblematical* of the Resurrection of the Body ; *which* likewise is a Doctrine improv'd by the Apostle to the Purposes of Heavenly-mindedness ; if then ye be risen with Christ, seek those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right Hand of God.

Once more, the Doctrine of *eternal Judgment*, even that every one of us must give an Account of himself to God,
the

the Truth of which, by the Declarations of his holy Word, the present unequal Administrations of divine Providence, the cruel Suffering of Innocence and Virtue, and the rude Triumphs of Ungodliness, the Nature and Perfections of the supream Being, the Ends of moral Government, and even natural Conscience and Instinct, is *loudly asserted and proclaim'd*, is a solemn Consideration, most effectually calculated, to promote the Interest of Righteousness & moral Holiness among Mankind. For who that realises this great Truth, that he must finally give an Account of himself to God, can live easy and satisfied in such a *Course of Action*, as he is fully persuaded in his own Conscience, must be disapprov'd of by his Judge at last; especially considering, as we always shou'd, that the *Design* of the universal Judgment, is to distribute to every Man, according to his Works, and to fix his eternal State according to his moral Character. The glorious Gospel, in the Hands of almighty God, under whose Influence all Means operate, is every Way a fit Instrument for the Reformation and Salvation of Mankind: It is the Power of God to Salvation to every one that believeth, and is mighty, thro' God, to the pulling down of strong Holds.—

Thus I have touch'd on some Points upon this great Argument, the godly Tendency, and practical Influence of the first and most uncontroverted Doctrines of the Gospel. This is the *internal Evidence* of the Truth of Christianity.

It wou'd be a hard Task to be oblig'd to find the same Tendency in all the Opinions of the several Sects of contending *Schemetists*, that have been trump't up, as necessary to be believ'd in order to Salvation. But it is a plain Inference from the foregoing Doctrine, that no Notion in Religion is either *Fundamental* or *Important*, that is not capable

pable of being improv'd to practical Purposes, and that whatever has an *ill Aspect* upon the Morals of Mankind, is *false* and *impious*.

We proceed to the next Head, under which I shall endeavour to be shorter.

II. It is the Business and Duty of the Ministers of the Gospel, to preach the *Doctrines of Practice*, and improve the Truths of Religion to the excellent Ends of Holiness and true Virtue. To this, there is a sacred & indispensable Obligation lying upon us, arising from the *Nature* of that holy Religion, of which we are made the Ministers. If the Gospel is a Doctrine according to Godliness, a divine Institution, calculated to serve the Ends of Holiness, and promote Piety and Virtue among Men, then it is absolutely incumbent upon all such as *preach* it, industriously to endeavour to render it effectual to these valuable and noble Purposes. This Consequence is undeniable.

Therefore,

III. Such as teach otherwise, are grossly ignorant of the *great Design* of their sacred Function, and *vilely* pervert it to the worst of Purposes. There are other Ends, beside the Advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom, the Promotion of Truth and Righteousness, and the Salvation of the Souls of Men, that *some* may possibly have in View, in entering into holy Orders, and wearing the sacred Character of the Ministers of the Gospel.

There are two opposite Kingdoms and Interests subsisting in the World, the *rightful Dominion* of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God and Heir of all Things; and the cursed *Usurpation* of Satan, the God of this World, who rules in the Hearts of the Children of Disobedience.

So

So that there is a *Mystery* of Iniquity, as well as a *Mystery* of Godliness, and there are not wanting those who are *expert* and *skilful* in the former, as well as in the latter.

The *Empire* of our Lord Jesus Christ, is founded in Truth and Righteousness, it is not a Kingdom of this World, nor is it erected by Force and Violence, by Oppression and Fraud, but by Reason and Argument, by moral Persuasion, and the Preaching the Truth which is after Godliness; the *Dominion* of the Prince of Darkness is founded in Ignorance, Superstition and Vice, and is promoted by temporary, worldly Views & Considerations, by the Doctrines of Ungodliness, and all the *deceivable* Acts of Unrighteousness. Satan is himself sometimes transformed into the Appearance of an *Angel of Light*; therefore it is no great Thing, if his Ministers be transformed as the *Ministers of Righteousness*. 2Cor. 11. 15.—

Some Ecclesiastics have been Men of the *blackest* Characters; and the most horrid Impieties and Villanies have been perpetrated under the *sacred* Covert of Religion. The grand Adversary of all true Religion, and his Accomplices in the Flesh, have not usually made their *Attacks* upon the Kingdom of Righteousness, by direct Force and Storm, but by *Feints* and *Artifices*, by *sapping* the Foundation of Godliness, and improving the Grace of the Gospel to the Purposes of Luxury and Wantonness.

And hence we find when our blessed Lord thought fit to enter a Caution to his Hearers against false Prophets, he describes them under the Character of *Wolves* in *Sheeps* Cloathing, greedy, vicious, *designing* Men, whose Aim was not to feed the Flock, but to feed upon them, and consequently made Religion a Cloak for their Covetousness. Mat. 7. 15.

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So St. Paul in his Farewell Address to the Elders of the Church of *Ephesus*, Act. 20. 28. Exhorts thus, *Take Heed therefore unto your selves, and unto all the Flock, over which the holy Ghost hath made you Overseers, to feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own Blood. For I know this, that after my Departure, shall grievous Wolves enter in among you, not sparing the Flock. Also of your own selves shall Men arise, speaking perverse Things, to draw away Disciples after them.*

They taught Doctrines that tended to *pervert* the right Ways of the Lord, and cause the Way of Truth, which is according to Holiness, to be evil spoken of; and this they did with *popular factious* Views, with a Design to *aggrandise* their own Persons, and acquire Fame by becoming Head of Parties, and to gratify their Avarice (as St. Peter expresses it) by making *Merchandise* of their Followers. 2 Pet. 2. 1. *But there were false Prophets among God's People of old, even as there shall be false Teachers among you Christians, who privily shall bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift Destruction. And many shall follow their lascivious Ways, by Reason of whom the Way of Truth shall be evil spoken of. And thro' Covetousness shall they with feigned Words make Merchandise of you.* *

Still these false heretical Teachers are represented under the Character of hypocritical, Worldly-minded unholy Men, and indeed such as were dissolute, abandon'd and vicious to the last Degree. And from these Fruits appearing in their Lives and Conversations, our blessed Lord, the perfect Pattern of Charity, instructs us to make up a Judgment

* Such Kind of *Spiritual Merchants* and *Holy Hawkers*, we have had in our Days, and some of 'em have made a *gainful Traffic* of it.

ment of their real Characters, and of the Principles from which they were actuated. *Do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles ?*

Agreeable to this is the Character given by our blessed Lord (who never call'd any Man out of his right Name) of the ancient Scribes & Pharisees, a set of Men, *infamous* for Impiety and Immorality, amidst the most *glaring* Pretences to Sanctity, almost beyond a Paralell ; for Cruelty and Oppression, for Pride and Presumption, and the most detestable Hypocrisy.

From whence the egregious Mistake of such appears, who have, beside all Truth represented them, as *strict Moralists*, whose principal Error, for which our Saviour censures and upbraids them, lay in *trusting* to their own Righteousness.

So in our Text, the Apostle says, such as teach otherwise, and consent not, &c.—Such Teachers are ignorant, proud, contentious, covetous and mischievous, and the genuine Tendency of their *unwholsome* Instructions, is to form their Hearers to the same Temper and Manners. It is true, a Man may *accidentally* practice Right, that entertains erroneous Opinions ; or the prevailing Integrity and uprightness of his Heart, may over-power the *malign* Influence of bad Principles : But the only solid and steady Foundation of godly, virtuous Practice, is laid in *Truth* : And all Impiety, Immorality, Mischief and Folly, is the natural Fruit and Production of Error, Superstition and Corruption of Principles. *A corrupt Tree cannot bring forth good Fruit, neither can a good Tree bring forth evil Fruit.*

More than enough has been said to prove the *Existence* of false Teachers and Impostors in Religion ; it is Matter

of Fact there have been such, and we have no Reason to expect but their always will be.

Two Things are observable to bring the Point under Consideration to a full Conclusion.

1st. That all false and erroneous Notions and Opinions in Religion, of any Consideration, are contrary to Godliness, and tend to the Emolument of the Kingdom of Satan.

2dly. That those who teach such ungodly Doctrines, are *really*, whatever Appearance they may make of the contrary, Men of debauched and vicious Characters.

1st. That all false and erroneous Notions and Opinions in Religion, of any Consideration, are contrary to Godliness, and tend to the Emolument of the Kingdom of Satan. As all religious Truths and Principles, are excellent and important, according as they promote Godliness, and tend to the Advancement of the Glory of God, by the Conformity of reasonable Beings to his moral Image and Perfections; so the *Malignity* of all false erroneous Doctrines is in exact Proportion to their *vicious* Influence & Tendency upon the Minds and Manners of Men. There is a mighty Difference in the Weight and Significance, both of Truths and Falshoods, that are conversant about Religion and Morality. Says one, "All Truth is good, and all Error bad; but there are many Truths so inconsiderable, and which have so small an Influence upon Practice, that they do not deserve our Zeal and earnest Contention about them: And so likewise are there many Errors and Mistakes of so slight and inconsiderable a Nature, that it were better Men should be let alone in them, than provok'd to quarrel and contend about them."

Our Lord came to call Sinners to Repentance, as well, as to lay the Foundation of Acceptance therein, by the Sacrifice

Sacrifice of his Death, to restore Mankind to the Favour and Image of God by universal Holiness, and true Virtue ; and so far forth as any Mistake & Error in Religion does not affect this glorious worthy Design of Christianity, it is merely speculative, indifferent and harmless, and in the very same Degree, that it leads to Ungodliness, Superstition and Vice, it is vile and pernicious, and destructive to the Souls of Men.

All Mistake and Error in religious Matters, is founded in Imagination only ; and the necessary Fruit and Consequence of such Delusions is *Superstition* ; the very Essence of which consists in substituting something else, of a different Nature, in the Place of true Godliness. Superstition is Religion without Virtue, the Form of Godliness without the Power of it. †

For Instance, such Notions of the supream Being, as represent Him reasonless and arbitrary in his Administrations, and Sovereign in such a Sense as to destroy all his moral Perfections, and capable of acting “ in moral Matters, without Regard to moral Reason,” tend to engender Superstition and Ungodliness, and deluge the World in Vice and Wickedness ; for-as-much as it *Mines* the Foundation of all real Virtue and Religion, by demolishing all the Motives of Obedience and Holiness, and the Grounds of Hope and Confidence towards God. From this or something like it, seems to have sprang, the endless Superstition of the Heathen World, the Worship of a lustful *Jupiter*, a thievish *Mercury*, a drunken *Bacchus*, and a wanton

† --- Porro amorı vertutis, studium veritatis, necessariò semper est conjunctum : Neque enim virtus est, cujus non sit origo *veritas* : Nec vitium quod non a mendacio sumat Initium.

wanton *Venus*, with all the shocking Rites of Impurity, Profaneness and Immorality. For it seems to be a natural Principle, common to all Religion, that the Worshipers endeavour to resemble the God they worship. Hence the *sacred* Exhortation, both to Jews and Christians, in Opposition to Paganism, *Be ye Holy*, for I the Lord your God, the Object of your religious Worship, *am Holy*. *

Again, such an Opinion concerning Justification, by Obedience to the divine Law, under the Covenant of Grace, as frustrates the Grace of God, in the Death of his Son, as a Sacrifice of Expiation for the Sins of the World, thro' Faith in his Blood, has a bad Aspect upon Practice. For it is observable, says One, " That that Righteousness
 " by Virtue of which, Believers are justified, is frequently
 " mentioned in Connection with the Sufferings & Death
 " of Christ, thereby to teach us, that this was the great
 " and explicit Design of them to procure for them a Righteousness, which should justify them before God. In
 " short, our Redemption from the Wrath and Curse of
 " God, and our Justification and Acceptance into Favour
 " with God, are always in Scripture attributed to the Blood
 " and Sufferings, and Death of Christ (the finishing Article of his Obedience) as the only meritorious procuring
 " Cause thereof. And upon the Account of this Righteousness, so effected for us, Christ is stilled the Lord
 " our Righteousness."

If it be ask'd how this Doctrine administers to Ungodliness ; I answer, it tends to beget Pride & Presumption, and Irreverence to the divine Majesty, his Authority and Laws ; for the Reason of the Death of Christ, as a Sacrifice of Attonement for Sin, seems to be, to reflect Honor upon the Law and rectoral Holiness of God, to declare his

* Levit. 20. 7. 1 Pet. 1. 15, 16.

his *Righteousness*, as the Apostle says, in the Forgiveness of Sins, that he might be *just*, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. It is in this very Thing Mercy and Truth have met together, and Righteousness & Peace have embraced each other. And this, perhaps, was that *Heresy* which consisted in denying the Lord that bought them.

Once more, That most *filthy Prostitution* of the Christian Religion, which consists in converting the Grace of God in the Gospel, into *Wantonness*, and relying upon the Righteousness of Christ, to the Neglect of Virtue and a good Life, which makes Christ the *Minister of Sin*, and perverts the Liberty of Christianity, to the Purposes of Unholiness and Licentiousness, is every Way dreadfully opposite to the Truth which is after Godliness; and is the most abominable and fatal Corruption of the Religion of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the Devil himself, can invent.

I shall conclude this Head in the Words of a solid Defender of the Christian Faith. * “ I know no such *Heresy* “ says he, as a wicked Life. That Man believes the “ Gospel best, that lives most agreeable to it. Tho’ no “ Man can have a worse Opinion of the *Socinian* Doctrine “ than I have, yet I had rather a Man should deny the “ Satisfaction of Christ, than believe it and abuse it to “ the Incouragement of Sin. Of the two, I have more “ Hopes of him that denies the Divinity of Christ, and “ lives otherwise soberly, righteously and godly in the “ World, than of the Man that owns Christ to be the “ Son of God, and lives like a Child of the Devil.”

2dly. That those who teach such ungodly Doctrines, are *really*, whatever Appearance they may make of the contrary, Men of debauched and vicious Characters. They are Wolves in Sheeps Cloathing, which supposes *Hypocrisy*; they

they make Merchandise of their Disciples, and suppose Gain to be Godliness, which implies *Covetousness*; they are proud, and speak perverse Things to draw a Party after them, and therefore are govern'd by the low & fordid Views of *Popularity*, and human Applause.

If they be grossly Hypocritical, and teach such Doctrines, as they know, in their Conscience, to be false, and tending to the Prejudice of Godliness, they are then debauch'd & vicious in the most aggravated and criminal Sense.

If they are Hypocrites, only in the more *common Acceptation*, deceiving themselves, as well as imposing upon othes, being ignorant of the true Nature and Tendency of the Notions they advance and defend, they are more excusable, but nevertheless guilty and Blame-worthy before God: Not because they act according to their Judgment and Conscience, but because they have not inform'd their Conscience better, and have suffered their Minds to be perverted and turn'd away from the Truth. Says the before mention'd Author, "Men may do the vilest and most wicked Things, not only under a grave Pretence of Religion, but out of a real Opinion & Persuasion of Mind, that they do religiously. Murder is certainly one of the greatest and most crying Sins, and yet our Saviour foretels that the Jews shou'd put his Disciples to Death, being verily perswaded, that in so doing they should offer a most acceptable Sacrifice to God; yea, the Time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, shall think that he doth God Service. Not but that the great Duties & Virtues of Religion are very plain and easy to be understood, and so are the contrary Sins and Vices: But then they are only plain to a teachable honest and well disposed Mind; to those who receive the Word with Meekness, and are not blinded with Wrath & furious Zeal: to those that receive the Truth into an honest Heart,
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and entertain it in the Love of it ; they are plain to the humble & meek ; for the humble, God will guide in Judgment, and the Meek he will teach his Ways ; such as these God seldom suffers to fall into fatal Mistakes about their Sin or Duty, so as to call Evil Good, and Good Evil, to call Light Darknes, and Darknes Light ; to think Uncharitableness a Virtue, and downright Murder a great Duty.

But if Men will give themselves up to be sway'd by Self-Love, and Self-Conceit, to be govern'd by any base or corrupt Interest, to be blinded by Prejudice, and intoxicated with Pride, to be transported and hurried away by violent and furious Passions ; no Wonder if they mistake the Nature, and confound the Differences of Things, in the plainest & most palpable Cases ; no Wonder if God give up Persons of such corrupt Minds to strong Delusions to believe Lies." Thus he.

St. Paul in the Text, taxes such with *Ignorance*, as held ungodly Tenets, and fomented Faction, Strife & Division, by stirring up unnecessary Controversies among Christians, about uncertain Opinions and foolish Questions, but this did by no Means excuse 'em ; their Ignorance was their Sin, their Error proceeded from *Wilfulness* & corrupt Affections, from Lust or Passion, from Pride or Prejudice, which clouds and darkens Men's Understandings, and causes such as have Eyes to see not, and such as have Ears to hear not. I suppose, no Man was ever more *sincere* than St. Paul was himself, both in his Zeal and Cruelty against Christians, before his Conversion, and his Repentance for it afterwards ; he verily thought he ought to do many Things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, he did it ignorantly in Unbelief, and so found Mercy, but yet he does by no Means excuse himself on this Account, but calls himself the *chief of Sinners*, and unworthy to be an Apostle, a Blasphemer and

a Murderer ; for had he not been blinded with Passion and Interest, but exercis'd the Understanding which God had given him, he never could have been guilty of such a *plain Mistake*, as to think that true Religion & Virtue could be propagated by Cruelty & Oppression, and the direct Violation of all the Laws of Nature and Reason. No Principle of true Religion can possibly be the *Source* of Folly and Superstition, of Uncharitableness and Contention, of Tyranny and Oppression. " All the Contentions and Animofities, all the Hatred and Malice, all the Persecution and Cruelties, which have ever been exercised in the World, under Pretence of Zeal for Religion, have, in Reality always arisen purely upon Account of Zeal for Matters of Men's own Invention, never out of Concern for the plain Laws and Commands of God."

No Man is *necessarily* ignorant of the great and fundamental Virtues and Duties of Religion & Humanity ; and whoever holds or propagates Opinions contrary to these, is himself *vicious* and *faulty*, in Proportion to their malignant Influence upon his Temper and Conduct ; and so far forth he is a Servant of the Kingdom of Darkeness ; and if he be a Minister of Religion, is *grossly ignorant of the great Design of his sacred Function*, and *vilely perverts it to the worst of Purposes*.

Two or three important Inferences from the foregoing Doctrine may be just hinted at, and left to the Hearers further Improvement, and we shall pass to a more particular, *occasional* Application of this Discourse.

1. We infer concerning the *general Nature* of that Faith which was once delivered to the Saints, and for which Christians are exhorted earnestly to contend ; that it consisted not in Points of dry Speculation, & metaphysical Distinctions and Niceties, nor in Matters of meer human Tradition, and the fallible

fallible Decrees of Popes and general Councils, not in Articles of doubtful Controversy, and of no considerable practical Influence, tending to Strife and perverse Wrangling, rather than godly Edifying ; but in those Doctrines only which were according to Godliness, in the Truth which is after Holiness, and in those Opinions that lead directly to a good Life.

These are the religious Principles, for which St. *Jude* advises Christians to *agonise*, in Opposition to the popular, avaritious, impure Tenets of those ungodly Men, who turn'd the Grace of God into Lasciviousness, and had Men's Persons in Admiration because of Advantage. Thus to contend for the Cause of Virtue, in Opposition to Ungodliness, is truly commendable, and a Zeal according to Knowledge. But when *this* is not at the Bottom, it is Pride, Ignorance, the Love of Glory, Power, Wealth, or the like, and not a pure Regard to the Interest of true Religion that engages Men in religious Contests. Heresy & Ungodliness are inseparably connected together, Faith and a good Conscience are embark'd in the same Bottom, and suffer Shipwreck both at the same Time ; hence *Heresy* is number'd among the Works of the Flesh, and *soundness* of Mind and Doctrine is oppos'd to Debauchery, Covetousness & Carnality ; whoever therefore contends against *Heresy*, or quarrels for *Orthodoxy*, without first seeing and being influenc'd by the necessary Relation they stand in to Vice and Virtue, has manifestly some other End to serve, besides that of true Religion. *

2. It follows that Mankind ought to be very industrious and careful, to inform themselves right in Matters of *religious*

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* Sound and unsound when applied to *moral* Purposes, have Relation to nothing but Vice or Virtue. A Heretic is a corrupt ungodly Man ; and Heresy in the bad Sense, always supposes Hypocrisy, and regards the Heart rather the Head.

gious Truth and Error; for a Man may be very sincerely mistaken, and in Consequence of such Mistakes, may do the most inhuman and wicked Things, and that too for Religion and the Glory of God: Not indeed, because the *Difference* between moral Good & Evil, is not wide enough to be discern'd, or because Men have not Faculties to discern it: but because they judge rashly, or indulge Prejudice, or are vicious, & suffer themselves to be deceiv'd. It becomes us to seek impartially after Truth, with virtuous and upright Minds, not regarding any particular *Schemes*, or fashionable Opinions of Parties; that our Faith may be well grounded, and that if we think right, it may be a Virtue, the Effect of Choice, not of Chance.

Freedom of Enquiry, in Matters of Religion, with Prudence and Virtue, ought not only to be tolerated, but encourag'd and urg'd, especially by the Ministers of Righteousness; and party Distinctions and *hard Names*, as much as possible laid aside; according to the wholesome Advice of our pious Fore-Fathers of this Country, whose Words are these "Let the Nick-Names of *Zuinglians* & *Calvinists* then cease, the Marks rather of Faction, than brotherly Union. "What shou'd we have to do with *Luther*? What shou'd we have to do with *Calvin*? We profess the Gospel, "we believe the Gospel."

Lastly, For as much as it is Matter of Fact that Mankind do and always must think differently from each other, with Regard to Things of little or no Importance in Religion, that is, which have no considerable Influence upon Practice, one Way or the other; a *catholick Spirit*, among all Parties, ought by all Means to be promoted towards each others in different Opinions and Practices.

Nothing is so much wanted to set the Christian World right, as a Spirit of *universal Love and Charity*. A blind uncharitable

uncharitable Zeal about uncertain Opinions and circumstantial Things, like the "*Worm at the Root of Jonab's Gourd*, tends to eat out the Vitals of true Religion." And about these precarious & controversial Things, some *pious peevish* Men think they do well to be angry, and are ready (with *Pope Paul* the fourth, upon his Death-Bed,) to recommend (if not the *Inquisition*, as he did, yet) very severe and unchristian Methods, for the Cure of these Evils.

But did our meek Lord teach such a Doctrine as this? Does the Gospel countenance Persecution for Conscience Sake? or could any Thing but Matter of Fact be sufficient to prove, the Cruelties, that have been exercis'd by Christians, one upon another? One of the most pernicious Errors in the World, seems to be this, that Men are to be ill-treated for their *harmless* Opinions. *Charity* is the most perfect Bond of Union among Christians, and is *greater* than Faith itself, & where there are the greatest Measures of this; on *that Side*, there is doubtless most Truth & most Religion.

Pardon me, my *Reverend Fathers and Brethren*, that I have presum'd to take upon me, a Task, to which I am so unequal.

Accept with Candour, my honest Endeavours humbly to remind you of the *noble Design* of the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has accounted you faithful, putting you into the Ministry; and of the *Duty* of that sacred and important Character, with which, in Conformity and Subordination to himself, for the good of Mankind, he has been graciously pleas'd to invest you.

Your Employment is honourable, divine and glorious. Like *holy Angels*, ye are sent forth to minister to them that shall be the Heirs of Salvation.

There is an unspeakable Pleasure & Satisfaction in doing Good, and a distinguishing Reward laid up in Heaven for such

such as turn many to Righteousness ; let these Considerations more than Ballance against all the various Difficulties and Temptations that necessarily attend a Station, so excellent and exalted.

The Reverend Person who is now, by his own Consent, to be consecrated to the Work of the evangelical Ministry in this Place, by the solemn Imposition of the Hands of the Presbytery, merits a more *particular Address*.

Dear Brother, You are thought worthy to bear a Commission under the Captain of Salvation : And as you are a *Volunteer* in this Service, it becomes you to be *brave* and *active*.

Your Office is to build up the Redeemer's Kingdom among Men, in Opposition to the Powers of Darkness, to preach the Doctrines of Godliness, and reform a vicious World, and thereby promote the glorious Design of that Gospel, of which you are made a Minister : Let therefore the Height of your Ambition be to serve the Interest of *Truth and Virtue*.

Sir, As it is at your Desire I stand here this Day, you will not take it ill, that I assume the Office of a friendly *Monitor*. Understand the Nature & Design of your holy *Function*, and pervert it not to vile and wicked Purposes. Take Heed that you do not profanely *prostitute* the sacred Character, to the dishonourable and low Ends of Avarice, Popularity, Impurity or Pride. Like a true Son of *Levi*, be able to say, of thy Father and of thy Mother, I have not seen them, nor regarded the dearest Relation, in Opposition to Truth.

Be *studious*, be *virtuous*, be *exemplary*. Mix *Devotion* with your Study.—Be an *honest* Inquirer after Truth—seek not the Applause of Men, of any Party or Character, but the Approbation of God, and your own Conscience. If you
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have the Happiness to keep up the Reputation of your *Orthodoxy*, you will find a mighty Advantage in it; like *Charity* it will cover a Multitude of Sins: But this you may lose, among some, and yet be a Friend to Truth.—Nevertheless have a strict Regard to your *Morals*.—Tread out the Path of Life before your People, and be a Pattern to the Believer in every Thing amiable in Conversation—keep thy self pure—by Lightness and Indiscretion, let no Man have Occasion to despise thy Youth. *Dear Sir*, be a cheerful Partaker of the Afflictions of the Ministers of the Gospel: There will be always some *ignorant, presumptuous* and *superstitious* Men, that will set themselves to oppose the Truth, which is after Godliness, and the Preachers of it: In *Meekness* these must be instructed, for the Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all Men, apt to teach, patient. There is no greater Hindrance to the Reception of Truth, than Violence & Passion, nor a greater Advantage to the *Evidence* of it, than the meek Behaviour of such as profess and teach it. A *rough impatient* Temper is incompatible with that happy *Facility*, in teaching that is incumbent upon the Ministers of Christ. You are the Servant of a *meek* Lord, and therefore must not be rude and contentious, rash and censorious; your own *generous* Disposition will teach you this excellent Lesson. That good Thing, that *godly Doctrine* that is committed to you, keep uncorrupt.—From such as *vapour* about Questions and needless Controversies, tending to Schism & Ungodliness, turn away.—But speak thou the Things which become *sound Doctrine*, *Tit. 2. 1.* namely, that Men of all Ages & Relations, behave suitably to their Characters, old and young, bond and free; for in this Way, both of *Preaching* and *Practising*, are Christians to look for the blessed Hope and glorious Appearing of the great God & our Saviour Jesus Christ.

I now turn myself to you, *Beloved Brethren*, of the Flock of Christ in this Place, sincerely congratulating your Happiness, in the Accession of a fit Person, to the *pastoral* Charge and Dignity over you. Behold the precious Gift of your ascended Lord : And receive & esteem him highly in Love for his Works Sake. Support him with Liberality and Cheerfulness ; think much of Nothing you do, of a worldly Nature, for *Him*, who breaks to you the Bread of Life, and labours to make you Possessors of the *true Riches*.

When you rejoice before the Lord your God, in the Success and Plenty with which he crowns your Labours, forget not among others, to rejoice the Heart of the Levite that is within thy Gates. † Then will he that ministers Seed to the Sower, still multiply your Seed sown, and increase the Fruits of your Righteousness, that you may be enriched in every Thing unto all Bountifulness.

He is now Bone of your Bone, and Flesh of your Flesh : And Oh ! How near and sacred is the Relation which all Christians sustain towards each other, and what *mighty Obligations* are they hereby laid under, to mutual Love and Peace, and Charity ? If there be Peace & Harmony in any Society under Heaven, it may be expected in the Church of Christ.

Brethren, You are all one Body, and you should endeavour to be all one Soul, that is, you shou'd all be of the same Mind towards each other's *Persons*, tho' differing from each other in Sentiments ; hereby endeavouring to preserve the Unity “ not of Opinion in the Bond of Ignorance, not of Practice in the Bond of Hypocrisy, but the *Unity* of a Catholic Christian Spirit in the Bond of Peace & Love.”*

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† Dut. 12. 18, 19. & 27. 11. 15.

* Any the least Degree of Ill-Will, for the Sake of Wrong or false *Opinions*, ought carefully to be avoided. These in themselves, are plainly

One Word to this whole Assembly, and I conclude. It is the Duty of Ministers, you have heard, to preach Doctrines of *Practice*, it is your Duty therefore to practice the Doctrines they preach. You may hear 'em, and believe 'em, but all will be to no Purpose, unless you obey them. The Gospel is a Doctrine calculated to make Men virtuous, holy and happy. It reveals the Wrath of God from Heaven, against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men. For he hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; of which he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead.

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plainly neither Virtues nor Vices, and do not at all affect Men's moral Characters; and yet thro' a false Zeal and bad Principles, have greatly obstructed their good Will towards one another. But upon Examination it will be found, this Principle works only in Proportion to Men's want of Integrity and Virtue in themselves; and that the love of *Truth* only, not of *right or wrong Opinion*, is consistent with the Perfection of Charity. For if Men do themselves depend upon any Thing but Integrity, and the Practice of Virtue, (as for Instance upon being in the Right in their Perswasions, which may be the Case of the virtuous or vicious) how can they forbear loving or hating *others*, more or less upon this Account? And so their Love will be directed, not according to real Merit, but accidental Qualities; and be restrained by Men's imaginary Errors, which also may be the Effects of Virtue and Integrity in them.

The Love of Truth therefore, and the Practice of Righteousness, is that Principle alone, which is capable of, or consistent with, universal Charity and Good-Will. Unity of Opinion there cannot possibly be, or seem to be, unless Men were equally Wise, and in the same Circumstance of Light; or equally Wicked or Hypocritical, in making the same Profession. In no Principles therefore can there be Unity among Men, but in the one uniform Principle of the *Love of Truth*. This I take to be the true unity of Spirit; which when join'd to the Bond of Peace, and Righteousness of Life, makes a really virtuous and good Man.

This may be worth the Consideration of those who affect a Zeal for Orthodoxy, destructive of Humanity and mutual Affection; and also put some good People upon enquiring, from whence proceeds their inordinate Concern about the right Faith of others; and their Coldness at least towards those who differ from them.

See a late Treatise, Intituled, *An Inquiry concerning Virtue & Happiness.*

Page 167, 168.

Let these solemn Considerations have their proper Weight and Influence with you at all Times, and especially *this Day*, to preserve you from that Profaneness and Indecency, those Debaucheries and Immoralities, too common upon the like Occasions, that are so inconsistent with the *Design* of the Gospel, and the *Nature* of the present Solemnity.

James Stockbridge
His Book

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